

Written testimony for the joint public hearing March 3, 2021 on proposed bills: SB948

My name is Roberta LaBelle-Thomas, I am a resident of West Haven and have family members with school age children in many cities around the state including Hartford, New Haven and West Haven. I, myself, am a product of CT schools and, more recently, I have witnessed various aspects of CT educational policies and practices through my volunteer and paid activities.

I have a deep commitment to the young people of our state. As a member of an SCSU JumpStart Team I helped provide learning support to preschoolers. Through other roles I have been part of mediation skills training for middle and high school students; facilitated communication skills training at several of the prisons in our state; and provided job coaching services to consumers being supported by the CT Department of Behavioral Services and the Department of Developmental Services.

I also have personal friendships with adults who have been trying to repair the damage done to them by lacks attributable to the way our public schools are run. I feel deeply disappointed by school funding systems that chose to mirror negative activity and/or ignore altogether the additional needs that poverty heaps on individuals too young and vulnerable to know what is happening to them.

The Covid-19 Pandemic we are working through has merely highlighted how many obstacles parents face in raising strong, confident, well-prepared children. And we know from exhaustive research that there is no substitute for children receiving the best education possible during their kindergarten, grammar and high school years. Hopefully CT will continue the education reforms recently begun as a much more productive use of state resources than back-end funding for incarceration and punishment that supports negative stereotypes.

The work that needs to be done to meet our children's educational needs falls on parents. Parents need the support of the school system to provide the maximum potential for success for their children. It has been known for many years that CT school funding is biased against the most vulnerable children and in our state. The provisions of SB948 continue the baby-step process which our legislature has chosen knowing all too well that the State Supreme Court has placed the burden of ensuring that all children in CT receive substantially equal educational opportunities squarely in your hands alone. If it is to be these baby-steps, we will need many of them. For this reason, it is imperative that SB948 be passed.